

Researching Everyday Life in the Main Urban Centres of Late Medieval Transylvania. The Model of Transylvanian Cities of German Foundation and Tradition.

II. Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives¹

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Article: history; Received: 12.12.2023; Revised: 23.12.2023

Accepted: 29.12.2023; Available online: 30.01.2024

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Abstract: A theoretical-methodological reflection must be situated at the beginning of any historical approach, with the aim of individualizing the discipline of the history of everyday (medieval) life and differentiating it as an independent branch of research.* The most important aspects of the investigation consist in: a) formulating clear questions and b) defining the goals of knowledge/understanding, to eliminate the risk of ending up with a simple collection of anecdotes – which, while undeniably captivating, cannot be considered science, and, consequently, becomes part of literature. In its elementary form, daily life is a simple manipulation of certain constants – the environment, people and things, understood through the daily repetition of certain activities, which become habits and are then performed mechanically. It is often stated that the history of everyday life does not have its own method, and it follows the analysis grids of history, more precisely of its auxiliary disciplines. Moreover, the history of everyday life remains dependent on the help of other sciences. In this context, the research is interdisciplinary, involving most of the auxiliary or frontier sciences of history: history of law, archaeology, literature and philology, music and art history, historical geography and ethnography, etc.

Research schedule and analysis grid. Based on the historiographic documentation, the theoretical-methodological excursion and the identification of the potential and the limits of the available sources, the

¹ „The first part of this paper was published under the title: Cosmin Cătălin Rusu, “Cercetarea vieții cotidiene în principalele centre urbane ale Transilvaniei medievale târzii. Modelul orașelor ardeleni de fundație și tradiție germană. I. Repere și contexte istoriografice,” in *Pasiune și Rigoare. Noi tentații istoriografice. Omagiu profesorului Ovidiu Ghitta, Ionuț Costea, Radu Mârza, Valentin Orga* (eds.) (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, Mega, 2022), 698-716.”

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perspective that this study proposes is that of a research program dedicated to the reconstruction of the history of everyday life in the late medieval Transylvanian urban centres. The proposed approach is organized into three distinct sections: a) that of the recomposing of frames and the dynamics of daily urban life; b) that of revealing the fundamental structures of everyday life in cities and c) that of identifying the challenges and solutions assumed by the day-to-day existence of individuals, groups and the urban community.

*The chosen methodological model has been adopted and modified according to the analysis-interpretation grid proposed by Gerhard Jaritz, *Zwischen Augenblick und Ewigkeit. Einführung in die Alltagsgeschichte des Mittelalters* (Wien, Graz, Köln: Böhlau 1989), 15-26.

Keywords: History of Everyday Life, Urban History, Transylvanian Saxons, Late Medieval and Premodern Archaeology and Material Culture, Late Medieval and Premodern Transylvania

Abstract: Reflexia teoretic-metodologică trebuie să stea la începutul oricărui demers istoric, având ca scop individualizarea disciplinei istoriei vieții cotidiene (medievale) și delimitarea acesteia ca ramură independentă a cercetării.* Cele mai importante aspecte ale investigației constau în: a) formularea de întrebări clare și b) definirea scopurilor cunoașterii/înțelegerii, pentru eliminarea riscului de a realiza o simplă culegere de anecdote – care poate fi foarte interesantă, însă nu mai poate fi apreciată drept știință, ci devine literatură. În forma sa elementară, viața cotidiană este o simplă manipulare a unor constante – mediu înconjurător, oameni și lucruri, înțelese prin repetarea zilnică a unor activități, care devin obișnuință și sunt îndeplinite apoi mecanic. Se afirmă adeseori că istoria vieții cotidiene nu are o metodă proprie, urmând grilele de analiză ale istoriei, respectiv ale disciplinelor auxiliare acesteia. De asemenea, istoria vieții cotidiene rămâne obligată ajutorului altor științe. În acest context, cercetarea este una interdisciplinară, implicând majoritatea științelor auxiliare sau de frontieră ale istoriei: istoria dreptului, arheologia, literatura și filologia, muzica și istoria artei, geografia istorică și etnografia, etc.

Programul de cercetare și grila de analiză. În baza documentării istoriografice, a excursului teoretic-metodologic și a identificării potențialului și a limitelor surselor disponibile, perspectiva pe care acest studiu îl propune este aceea a unui program de cercetare dedicat reconstituirii istoriei vieții cotidiene în centrele urbane ale Transilvaniei medievale târzii într-o abordare structural-tripartită: a) cea a recompunerii cadrelor și a dinamicii vieții cotidiene urbane; b) cea a relevării structurilor fundamentale ale vieții de zi cu zi din

orașe și c) cea a identificării provocărilor și soluțiilor presupuse de existența de zi cu zi a indivizilor, grupurilor și comunității urbane.

*Modelul metodologic avut în vedere este preluat și adaptat după grila de analiză-interpretare propusă de către Gerhard Jaritz, *Zwischen Augenblick und Ewigkeit. Einführung in die Alltagsgeschichte des Mittelalters* (Wien, Graz, Köln: Böhlau 1989), 15-26.

Cuvinte-cheie: istoria vieții cotidiene, istorie urbană, sași ardeleni, arheologie și cultură materială medievală târzie și premodernă, Transilvania medievală târzie și premodernă

The historical reconstruction of everyday life (German *Alltagsleben*, French *vie quotidienne*, Italian *vita quotidiana*) represents a clearly delimited research compartment of historical writing that has, over the last five decades, gained a well-defined historiographical tradition. The field opens a highly diverse thematic landscape. Its valences and potential have continuously offered researchers exciting opportunities for investigation and analysis.² Towards the end of the 1970s, the history of everyday life started to take shape as a new field of study, one that some scholars deemed to be “a new social history”. The concept of “everyday life” was used by 19th century philosophers to denote the sum of repetitive human activities. The very same concept was adopted and adapted by the new field of study. Over time, the new direction taken by historical investigation has identified its own topics of interest and specific concepts and has managed to offer a series of methodological benchmarks, doubled by a pronounced interdisciplinary character.

A first methodological question concerns whether or not the simple dissociation between the time of everyday life and the time of celebration would be enough. If the answer is positive, then when, how and by what does the celebration begin? If what is repeated daily (an eventless routine) is everyday life, what outlines the occurrences that are merely annual or that take place with other regular frequencies? The definition is not and will never be universally applicable. Each attempt at conceptual delimitation can only cover the specific case to which it refers.

² To outline an overview of the historiography of the subject, consult the bibliographies of the volumes Robert Delort, *La vie au Moyen Age* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1982); Hans-Werner Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages. From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); *Alltag im Spätmittelalter* Hrsg. von Harry Kühnel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1986) and the work of the *Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* in Krems an der Donau/Austria (<https://www.imareal.sbg.ac.at>).

Furthermore, oftentimes, the new notions and phrases introduced into the theory only complicated the perceptions and possible conclusions. Some authors tried to limit the investigation only to the private-domestic field. The generic meaning of the everyday life, however, defines the conventionally (and subjectively) constituted concepts that mark the sum of all experiences that reflect the reality of the knowledge/consciousness of an individual and/or of communities, necessarily dependent on the constant of repetitiveness.

In this context, what can be understood by “everyday life”? Scholars from a wide array of disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, social history or ethnography have successively or complementarily endeavoured to address this question. However, an unanimously accepted definition has not been outlined and it is likely unachievable. The history of everyday life is a discipline that is continuously being rewritten, as new elements (variables) appear constantly, while the “already known” aspects (constants) continuously receive new interpretations. The field is therefore neither a clearly defined, nor a definable one, this being perhaps the most fertile ground where ethnography/ethnology intersects popular culture (daily life is not limited to “the people”, and culture means more than merely daily life!), and material culture becomes complementary to the history of culture.

The concepts of “everyday life”, “life” or “culture of things/objects” are often used in parallel, with no clear distinction between their meanings. The first people interested in these notions were the philosophers and sociologists. They offered a present-past relational perspective in the interpretation of the concepts, but failed to delineate the unitary views in what these are concerned. In a pioneering study, N. Elias presented the fact that the notion of “everyday life” is not only completely devoid of unity/uniformity, but is used more as a counter-concept(!) to its own definition: “everyday life” in contrast to the time of the celebration; “routine” in opposition to the extraordinary in the life of the communities; “labour” (the world of the labourer) different from the everyday profitable activities of the townspeople, or their free time; the “life” of the masses other than that of the elites; “frameworks of everyday life” in relation to major (political, social, religious) events; “private life” at the opposite end of the public-profit one (the workplace). Given that the multivalence of the concepts is an obvious one, it is practically impossible to outline a universally valid definition of “everyday life”, which would integrate all the elements and aspects assumed by the valences of the main notion. Each researcher thus has the freedom and, at the same time, the duty to reflect on their own interpretation of the notion

of “everyday life”, which, by choice, may not be consistently adhered to. Delimited by N. Elias by what it is not, respectively by what belongs to the “non-daily life”, the daily life consists of routines and communication, which incorporate the natural and socio-cultural contexts: the environment, climate, language, spirituality, religion, etc. Thus, if we identify and superimpose the notion of “everyday life” with that of “human life”, the term “everyday life” becomes a tautology(!). However, the negative definition of everyday life with the help of counter-concepts appears unsatisfactory, given that it covers only part of the meanings of the term. However, any attempt at a positive definition is inevitably limited, due to its multitude of possible perspectives.³

If we were to start from the German term that defines the everyday (*Alltag*), this can be explained in its proper sense: *All* = a whole, a permanent-repeatable and general-traditional totality (the days that are similar) and *Tag* = time, measurable and estimated/evaluated on the one hand by humans, and, on the other hand, “regulated” by nature (the setting and rising of the Sun, the heat, the opposition of night, respectively the sleep and rest of humans, the movement of the Earth/its rotation around the Sun, the increase and decrease in the length of days, the seasons, time and space, the environment (*Umwelt*), the living environment (*Lebenswelt*), etc.). Put together, the WHOLE and the TIME reflect the unity found in everyday life, between natural phenomena and human action. In essence, it concerns the relationships between biological “beings” - unfolded over the course of days (in a natural space and time), and those between man and non-human factors (which man accepts or changes), respectively. In G. Jaritz’s view, “the connections of everyday life” presuppose the delimitation of at least four realities/determinants that interact multivalently: THE MAN (with their specificities of sex, groups/communities, age, etc.) - THE OBJECT (the multivalent relationship between man and object) - THE SITUATION (the stance towards the multivalent relationship between man and object) - THE QUALITY (shape, colour, material, size, value, function, number). Thus, the analysis of everyday life becomes possible when based on communication and inter-relationship. As the human being is found permanently within a context (in a certain situation), each person has their own daily life. Therefore, the analysis must be one of several, individual and different realities.⁴ Everyday existence is therefore

³ Norbert Elias, “Zum Begriff des Alltags,” in *Materialien zur Soziologie des Alltags*, Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Sonderheft 20, Kurt Hammerich, Michael Klein eds. (Opladen: Westdt. Verl. 1978), 22-29.

⁴ Gerhard Jaritz, “Mittelalterliche Realienkunde: Quellenbefund und Quelleninterpretation,” in

composed of an unlimited number of individual “daily realities”. Every man has their own daily life, never identical to that of another, and independent of their position in society. According to this theory, the fundamental premise from which one must start is that every private life and every personal circle of life is original and unrepeatable. However, to be able to attempt making any historically valuable reconstructions, it is necessary to transcend what constitutes the particular/special (and the individual!). This involves the identification of certain general frameworks and knowing/recognizing repeatable behaviours/attitudes. At the same time, the history of everyday life should not be exclusively assimilated with a history of “those from the lower classes” or with a history of “those lacking power/influence”, despite the fact that this has been the practice in scholarly literature so far, to different extents. However, we must note that the objective of the history of everyday life is to conduct meticulous and effective investigations. Such approaches must include the “lower” social categories. These categories have been intentionally or unintentionally overlooked in other history-related research fields, and, as such, they received little to no scientific attention.⁵

What is the research object of the history of medieval everyday life? Essentially, medieval life, in its fundamental expressions, addresses issues that are seemingly rather straightforward: how individuals and communities dressed, where they sheltered and how they kept warm, how they ate and how they drank, why and how they worked, what they thought and what they prayed for, how they lived/cohabited day by day. An entire context of thematic-structural regroupings and intersections can lead to the reconstitution of “medieval daily cultural behaviour.” This subject requires the documentation and interpretation process to not overlook criteria such as necessity, need, adequacy, reference to norms, value and valorisation, public character and intensity, representativeness and prestige. Only their integration allows for an intelligible ordered structure. Also, the historical conception of everyday life, as a construct subsumed by historical science, must be explained and understood in an evolutionary sense. Thus, the history of medieval daily life is (also) the

Die Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur des Mittelalters. Methode - Ziel - Verwirklichung (Vienna: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), 36.

⁵ The presentation of theoretical approaches regarding the history of medieval everyday life is based on the observations and comments made by Norbert Elias, “Zum Begriff des Alltags,” *passim*; Peter Borscheid, “Alltagsgeschichte - Modetorheit oder neues Tor zur Vergangenheit?” in Wolfgang Schieder, Volker Sellin (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte in Deutschland*, III (Göttingen, 1987), *passim* and especially Gerhard Jaritz, *Zwischen Augenblick und Ewigkeit. Einführung in die Alltagsgeschichte des Mittelalters* (Wien, Graz, Cologne: Brill Österreich GmbH, 1989), *passim*.

history of the living space, the environment, the circles of existence, the domains of life, the living conditions, the forms of life, the way of life, the management/coordination of life, etc.

From the variety of possibilities and proposals regarding the definition of the content of daily life, the essential aspects include the fundamental traits of people's lives, namely the standard structures of the classical history of culture: housing, food, clothing, work, play, love, perception and valorisation of time, sociability, hygiene, family life and the course of life itself. The criterion of regularity remains rather relative, including holidays and the culminating points of existence, which are repeated in a certain rhythm. By belonging to the field of historical science, the recomposition of the frameworks of everyday life must (also) be linked to communities, not merely to isolated individuals. As a general rule, the history of everyday life reproduces a chronicle of normality, and its research object illustrates "the average man" – the one who becomes representative of a larger number of individuals. Its goal is to identify the typical within the multitude of individual destinies. The interest goes beyond both the elites/personalities, and the "lower class people", unlike the studies of the daily life of contemporary societies (but it is highlighted only exceptionally in relation to the medieval world). "Daily life" is a type of historical reconstruction which – for the Middle Ages – must include the frameworks of the existence of nobles, clerics and monks, peasants, townspeople (agricultural workers and day labourers, craftsmen and merchants, lower categories of the urban population), as well as marginal groups. To the greatest extent possible, the reconstruction must be completed with questions related to time and space, age, sex, origin-ethnicity, education, gainful activity – profession, denomination, etc.

What are the classic themes of medieval everyday life research?

The first aspect is labour (effort, striving), i.e. the mission and service of the descendants of Adam and Eve: gathering, hunting, fishing, raising animals, cultivating the land, household – kitchen activities, but also crafts – woodworking, stone working and working with bone, skin and wool, various textile plants, the production of ceramics, metal and glass. Subsumed to this, the investigation must also be interested in the house and its furnishings, in the concentration of several housing structures – built and grouped according to the organization of different jobs or having precise "functionalities" – peasant houses and urban houses, fortresses/burghs, castles and palaces, churches and parish houses, monasteries and episcopal residences, fairs and city complexes. The everyday perspective on work and adjacent social relations must assume

a global approach, integrating ownership and possession, legal hierarchies and relationships, price controls and exchange/trade regulations into the analysis.

Another major component of everyday life is the family structure – parents, husband and wife, children, young people, the elderly, as well as the entire universe of relationships generated by its daily frameworks – life by gender, love, celebration, pleasures and games, birth-marriage-death, aspects of demography, community spirit, private life, biological existence of the human body. It is well known that medieval daily life was structured almost entirely on interconnected solidarities identifiable mainly in urban environments. However, useful analogies can also be identified in the rural world, and in the seniors' environments, respectively. Every inhabitant of the city – from the powerful and rich to the simple and poor – was socially responsible, holding a small part of human dignity and implicitly the illusion/chance of equality and even power. This reality was based on the fact that the townspeople either belonged to a corporation (a guild, a brotherhood of journeymen or any other type of association/community with a secular or religious character), or were integrated into the “pyramid” of a feudal type or another hierarchies (servants, apprentices and journeymen of the guilds, craftsmen and resident nobles, urban elites and their relatives).⁶

The human body in turn has extensive implications for the analysis and understanding of medieval private life. The history of the naked body can be traced ichnographically from Isidore of Seville, through the late Romanesque or Gothic era, to the Renaissance. The human body can be investigated physically, biologically and psychologically. It represents the direct “object” of the action of diseases,

⁶ For example, the regulations regarding clothing could provide information about the senior, but also about his concentric groups – how the senior dressed, his wife, children and all those who, in one way or another, were dependent or had different connections with his person. However, the revealed data can be much more complex. They refer to a wider circle of people – friends, squires, knights, nobles, pages, clerics and laymen, warriors, and to aspects of material culture proper – the items of clothing of servants or the activity of master tailors and merchants who traded parts and clothing accessories. In this way, an image is formed which, depending on the importance of the senior (of the potentate, in general), multiplies further on towards tens, hundreds or even thousands of people. Other aspects that can and must be included in the analysis consider the clothing items functionalized as gift, compensation/retribution, reward or alms, or the social position expressed through clothing in the eyes of “public opinion”. At the same time, clothes represented a fundamental element of private life. This was the space where the pressure of fellow citizens and public life disappeared. Here, in the privacy of the house, you could make yourself “comfortable”, with your wife/girlfriend or with the family in general. Elias, “Zum Begriff des Alltags,” 56-57.

aggressions, accidents. At the same time, it is in a permanent relationship with the principles and norms of hygiene, cosmetics or vanity.⁷ The questions related to daily existence must also aim at how the individuals of the Middle Ages used their senses or how they perceived-interpreted their sensitivities: sight reproduces shapes and colours, related to age, regions or eras; smell perception identifies natural substances, from the perspective of cosmetics and food; taste judges and classifies the sensations of sour, bitter, salty, sweet, whether it was pleasant or unpleasant, familiar or foreign; from the multitude of everyday sounds (natural and artificial), hearing also recognized and made the difference between the agreeable ones and the unbearable ones.⁸

Of particular importance is the relation of the human body and its perceptions with the (natural) environment and living conditions. From this perspective, the essential determinants were the physical-geographic ones: relief, climate (air temperature, winds, precipitation), soils, hydrographic regime (flowing waters, stagnant waters, underground – phreatic and deep – waters) and the biological ones: vegetation and fauna. The environmental factors that conditioned daily existence were represented by relief variations (coastal areas, meteorites, the “washing” effect of rivers) and the movement of the earth’s crust, as well as the effects of the actions of the anthropic factor. The way in which individuals related to environmental variables⁹ (assessing/measurement of temperatures, water level, intensity of solar radiation, etc.) also had a multitude of implications for the development of everyday life: the amount of precipitation (rain, snow, drought), the blooming of the plants, the harvest, the invasions of locusts or other pests, epidemics/epizootics caused by rodents, etc. The easiest to perceive (and recombine) are the changes in the biological environment. In the era, the resource requirement of man was very strongly conditioned by the vegetation and/or by the varying predominance of wood essences (for example, conifers or deciduous trees): plants used for food/medicinal purposes or

⁷ For example, hairstyles, which changed according to gender, age, social class, region, ethnicity, fashion or succession of generations.

⁸ The man of the 14th and 15th centuries lived in a different environment than the man of today. The sounds and noises, the smells, the optical excitations were different, depending on the environments and structural contexts specific to the era (the “cleanliness of the streets”, the public announcements regarding ordinances and regulations, the building of toilets, the image of the sick and crippled on the streets, the general state of hygiene of a city, etc.).

⁹ In Europe, the general climate constants were marked by a warming period between the 9th and 14th centuries, followed by a cooling period between the 14th and 19th centuries (the so-called “Little Ice Age”).

'magical' plants, plants with technical uses (for the production of clothing pieces, as a fuel material, in various crafts and in construction), but also those appreciated for their beauty and/or smell. The world of animals (vertebrates or invertebrates; wild or domesticated) was, in turn, intensely valued on a daily basis in the era. Man raised domestic animals, hunted or fished – for food or profit, for defence, and sometimes for “fun”. The protein amount contained by products of animal origin considerably enriched and varied the daily diet. Depending on the area, domestic and wild birds, carp, but also herring, salmon or even snakes, cattle, sheep and goats, pigs, horses, bears, rabbits, bees, etc. were valued. In turn, the work surrounding the procurement-production-marketing of the products thus obtained becomes one of maximum relevance for medieval daily existence. In the future, special studies on the place and role of animals in everyday life will undoubtedly enhance the overall understanding and depiction of medieval everyday life. Last but not least, the study of microorganisms in the environment can bring additional information about the causes of diseases, allergies or involuntary poisoning.¹⁰

The most important element for the analysis and, implicitly, the reconstruction of medieval daily life is represented by a **rigorous criticism of the sources**. Basically, three questions are fundamental in relation to source analysis: What does the source actually mean? What does (can) it say about everyday life? What does the information revealed by it mean, from the perspective of the actual intention? Theoretically, any source or group of sources can be used to reconstruct medieval everyday life, but the history of everyday life cannot be reproduced directly from the content of the sources. On the one hand, the sources *mediate* and offer different perspectives for recomposing reality, while, on the other hand, historians *interpret* the sources in an inevitably subjective manner. This context implies a “double assumption” in relation to reality(!). Honestly, we can only talk about a “reality of the source” and not about one of “life”, the reconstruction thus becoming primarily a communicative discourse. The sources of the period must be scrutinised meticulously and rigorously, given that no type of medieval historical source had ever actually been intended to document everyday life. In fact, aspects of it are very rarely and rather accidentally revealed/presented as such. Those who investigate everyday life formulate questions for which the sources do not provide direct answers. Almost without exception, there is a very large discrepancy between modern research inquiries and

¹⁰ Norbert Elias, “Zum Begriff des Alltags,” 58-59.

the intention of the authors of the sources. Medieval sources about daily life offer such recounts somewhat unintentionally, given that their primary goal had initially been to portray other matters. From the perspective of the presumed intent behind these sources, the information thus gathered is almost without exception incomplete and merely offers a mosaic of snippets of everyday life. Consequently, a reliable reconstruction of the overall picture is difficult to achieve. Thus, the re-composing and explaining of a certain sequence of analysis must be certified by a corroboration of several types of sources (if possible). Also, the vast majority of sources do not primarily reproduce the reality of everyday life. It is precisely the sources that refer to everyday life – legislation, ordinances, norms, sermons, books of penance – that usually “destroy” the custom habit. They are created and disseminated for disciplinary or moral-didactic reasons – especially in literature and art – and they often depict a counter-image of everyday life. In general, tend to focus on noteworthy events or exceptional occurrences that deserve further attention or remembrance (art objects, narratives and poems, and sometimes even archaeological material – in the case of luxury artifacts).

The typology of the sources – the variety and number in which they are preserved, as well as the information contained in them – limits the frames of historical reconstruction. The type of accessible sources most often dictates the outline of the research methods, but the relationship can also be built in the opposite direction – by the prior establishment of a particular analysis grid, which leads to a selection of the categories of sources used, and to the outlining of the ways in which they are exploited, respectively. Information with an increased degree of certainty for the reconstruction of medieval daily life is mainly provided by the archaeology of the Middle Ages. Through it, soil samples and artefacts can be collected/revealed, data on the changes made to the environment, information about the arrangements and constructions of the era. However, the medieval archaeologist has more cultural-historical problems to solve than any other specialist in this field of study. The objects (artifacts preserved in the ground; architectural monuments and their representations) represent the starting point for the study of everyday life. They offer a completely new perspective on the questioning of “classical” sources: written and (icono)graphical, the latter representing sources that do not reproduce the everyday (the common), but the unique (the extraordinary), that “non-daily”, which, over time, does not repeat itself in the same manner and in the same place. Archaeological research itself must be complemented by calling onto and analysing the paedology, dendrochronology, palaeobotany, and

palaeozoology, as well as through geo-physical surveys and aerial archaeology investigations. One means of ensuring the success of different endeavours to reconstruct different segments of daily life is to employ both the raw information and its interpretation stemmed from the material culture (archaeology of the Middle Ages) and the collaboration of certain complementary fields. Thus, customs can be reconstituted by borrowing interpretation practices from ethnography, art objects by means of art history analyses, poetry and narratives by means of literary studies, and terminology by methods specific to linguistics. However, the information retrieved through means borrowed from complementary fields demands meticulous scrutiny and rigorous critique, as these fields essentially deal with their own sources, developing particular, specific research interests.

All these types of historical sources are limitless in their potential to reconstruct daily medieval life. The challenge lies in interconnecting them. The items uncovered during certain archaeological surveys must be placed in relation with both the information present in the written sources and the depictions in the iconographic sources. The descriptions and images must be subjected to an in-depth comparison with certain osteological and pollen analyses, as well as with the existing inventories that previously provided the context for the potential analogies. Because of the plurivalence of the sources, one must never overlook the fact that such approaches usually lead to inherent contradictions regarding the reconstruction of the elements of everyday life.

The theoretical-methodological reflection must be the starting point of any research endeavour. In the case under scrutiny, a clear outline must be drawn for the history of everyday (medieval) life as an individual field of study.¹¹ The most important aspects of the investigation consist in: a) formulating clear questions and b) defining the goals of knowledge/understanding, in order to eliminate the risk of ending up with a simple collection of anecdotes – which, while undeniably captivating, cannot be considered science, and, consequently, becomes part of literature. In its elementary form, daily life is a simple manipulation of certain constants – the environment, people and things, understood through the daily repetition of certain activities, which become habits and are then performed mechanically. It is often stated that the history of everyday life does not have its own method, and it follows the analysis grids of history, more precisely of its auxiliary disciplines.

¹¹ The chosen methodological model has been adopted and modified according to the analysis-interpretation grid proposed by Jaritz, *Zwischen Augenblick und Ewigkeit*, 15-26.

Moreover, the history of everyday life remains dependent on the help of other sciences. In this context, the research is interdisciplinary, involving most of the auxiliary or niche sciences of history: history of law, archaeology, literature and philology, music and art history, historical geography and ethnography, etc.

Practically, no methodology for the research on everyday life is set in stone – the history of everyday life is (re)composed and can offer interpretation solutions only by employing the methods of other historical fields and making the necessary comparisons. However, in order to establish the frameworks of the discipline and to conduct a structured analysis, the interpretation scheme must take into account several variables. The first aspect regards the “reality” of everyday life, which are identifiable within different types of sources: objects, inventories, accounting books, wills, etc. For example, if the list of objects and elements contained in an inventory (the “reality” of the inventory) suggests, with relative certainty, that they had been part of and had been used in the circle of existence of the person in question, it does not mean that the same objects had been designated, valued and used in the same way by others. Similarly, the scenario extends to the attributes assigned to various objects, such as a large table, a bad coat, or a heavy sword. The assumption that this type of source is exhaustive must be avoided. Likewise, the exhaustiveness criterion must be carefully administered. As a rule, an inventory does not contain all of the objects in a building, an account register does not record all transactions (and those recorded are not presented/detailed in the same way), and a will does not list all of the goods left as an inheritance. A peasant's references to his own possessions, deemed noteworthy, will invariably be more concise compared to those of an individual from the upper class or an urban resident. For people of modest social and economic-financial origins, the lists (from accounts, wills and inventories) that contain certain categories of objects or goods provide more detailed information than those regarding higher class social groups (for example, in the case of household inventories or clothing items). In these situations, research exploits the “raw material of reality” (but not reality itself): simple objects from the individual's environment. Information of this type can be very diverse, but it rarely provides details about what the objects in question look like, what ultimately happened to them, or what they were used for. Other criteria that must be taken into account are the quality and the context of the use of the “archaeological” objects: some are more resistant, some are refurbished/-able (sometimes receiving a different use), and some end up being known/used in the most diverse socio-cultural environments. The same objects and goods are valued differently by

individuals. For example, the absence of iron objects in certain archaeologically studied regions does not necessarily imply that iron was only utilized minimally in that area. The value of iron in the period was high, which led to the frequent refurbishment or recycling of objects made from this metal. Similarly, wooden, textile or ceramic objects – lower in value and easier to produce – were often abandoned when they were damaged, a situation that raises difficulties in interpreting the weight and relevance of the archaeological material.¹²

The “supposed” realities are those that tried to mediate “truth and reality”, through the filter of recounting one’s own experiences, of describing places and things or of presenting certain situations. These images are reproduced by different authors in the contents of letters, chronicles, diaries, travel descriptions, legal protocols, literary sources or iconographic representations. The “reality” of a biography, the description of a foreign country, an image or a poem must be viewed through the lens of the intention with which it had been made and can never truly reflect the reality of life or that of everyday life (even when the description seems strikingly precise, detailed or very plausible or when its starting point is found in real events or things). “Image reality” remains “the reality of an image” and “travel description reality” is still the “reality of a travel description.” These cannot reproduce the reality of life, given that their actual purpose was to awaken certain thoughts and feelings or to appeal to memory and tradition and not necessarily to reconstruct everyday life. Most often, these sources are used (and credited) because of the (sometimes complete) lack of other sources. A relevant analysis must identify the context for the relationship between this type of sources and other types of sources.¹³

Landmarks and, implicitly, documents with normative value represented one of the fundamental elements supporting the existence of the medieval world.¹⁴ Relatively numerous, these regulations pertain to individuals and groups of people, states and social categories, addressing both general and specific aspects of existence, private life or work. Their goal was to create and organize the frameworks of community life – regarding the observance of customs, moral-religious aspects, the components of the social system and economic relations. They impacted virtually every aspect of everyday life (regulations regarding clothing and

¹² Ibid., 16-18.

¹³ Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁴ Medieval everyday life most likely meant minimal knowledge of legal norms. It was generally known what happened to thieves, robbers and criminals. Likewise, the norms regarding behaviour and urban life were also widely known (for example, guild members knew or were supposed to know their own regulations).

social behaviour, the organization and functioning of crafts, relations with the environment, etc.). The true significance of the interpretation of these norms emerges when the elements related to their dissemination, reception, compliance, and validity are effectively assimilated and processed. Their critique requires careful consideration, may incorporate elements that no longer correspond to the reality at the time of their issuance. They often encapsulate quasi-stereotypical frames developed over several generations or even centuries. It is difficult to assess with certainty whether frequently repeated elements in regulations and ordinances still find their correspondent and/or reflex in the reality of everyday life. Certain norms would not be/remain relevant for the actual situations to which they referred. Thus, what had been stated in a norm did not necessarily have to correspond to “everyday” reality. Although they provide valuable data for capturing the mentality of the era, the norms mostly reflect only individual situations, personal values, perspectives or needs of individuals, groups or communities (usually circumscribed to certain dominant categories). Along the same lines, much of the information contained in the sources regarding medieval daily life only reflects a desire and/or an ideal (as well as their correspondent: the negative reflex). Desires and ideals are obviously components of everyday life, their expressions being found in sermons, didactic-moralizing literature, but especially in images (for example, the numerous representations of interiors with the Virgin in the Nativity scene are to a greater extent in a “furniture catalogue” of the era, than in an actual everyday reality). Often the historical reconstruction tends to induce – by means of the voluntary direction of the analysis – the desired result. That is why a (hypo)thesis must be proven or rejected empirically, to the detriment of the assumptions reconfigured in the conclusions.¹⁵

The variety of study initiatives dedicated to the reconstruction of medieval daily life led to the identification of certain trends and challenges that any scholar willing to approach this field must face. Contemporary historians have often tried to project their own interests and concerns about the past (for example, in the 19th century, the labour movement, or around the mid-20th century, ecology and environmental issues) into their research on medieval everyday life. Thus, topics such as those related to labour and labourers, or nature became closer/familiar to the history of medieval daily life.¹⁶ The reconstruction of medieval everyday life must be understood and described as a history that comprises broad categories of individuals,

¹⁵ Jaritz, *Zwischen Augenblick und Ewigkeit*, 19-23.

¹⁶ In context, we must note that the reference systems valid today can be used in the study of the past only by addressing the questions they raise and not in terms of their meaning and valorisation.

realities that are repeated an infinite number of times (unquantifiable), general conditions (defined with as much objectivity as possible), duration and routine. Ideally, a synthesis dedicated to this topic should almost completely exclude the “picturesque detail,” as these are often present in sources due to their unique occurrence. It is practically impossible for a portrayal of universal daily life to encompass a mosaic of details or recount anecdotes, intriguing as they are. Such data tends to evoke the extraordinary, contrasting with the prevalent focus on the commonplace aspects of everyday life that often go unremarked. In its ideal version, this type of writing should be logical, should propose and develop models, build theories and use percentages and statistics.¹⁷

An overview on the recent reconstructions of the history of everyday life reveals it as fairly diverse. In the German-speaking area, interpretations predominantly centre around the study of sources or structural history. Structural history is notably characteristic of French historiography, whereas English and Swiss approaches tend to prioritize reconstructions specific to the history of culture. Although they operate with a multitude of perceptions and forms regarding everyday life, most of these models of historical reconstruction do share a number of common elements. First of all, the investigation is almost without exception descriptive. The target audience for works of this kind are usually the general public, where they are likely to garner more interest than within the scientific community. Often, they take the form of books intended for young adults. Consequently, they have simple titles (*Daily life in...* or *Life in...*), designed to attract. With few exceptions, they are not monographic research endeavours on the history of the everyday life, but collective volumes of studies or, more frequently, syntheses that deal either with chronological segments or with the entire Middle Ages. These are general, useful works, but they most often neglect the theoretical and methodological aspects.

As its final purpose, the history of medieval everyday life must be more than a three-dimensional connection (between the subject of the past, the author and the current subject), synchronizing theory and empiricism, through micro-historical analyses (in fact, contributions to future macro-historical syntheses). The field would thus offer the possibility of new investigative perspectives, through relevant and continuously (re)updated questions on the classical endeavours in the history of culture, which would create causalities and/or involve effects, thus awakening the interest in history of laymen and beginners.

¹⁷ Moreover, the price tables, the identification of plowing cycles or the data provided by paleoclimatology, which can be easily generalized, are very useful.

The space and chronology of the research. The research on daily medieval urban life represents, for the specialized exegesis, one of the most promising and equally fascinating chapters of the reconstruction of the past. Given that this field of historical investigation was established as such only in the last half century, the historiography that treats the Transylvanian space has not approached topics in this sense in a truly in-depth manner. Some of the studies on social history, economic history, material culture, the history of architecture or art history have tangentially touched on aspects of restitution specific to the history of everyday life. The post-communist period brought about a significant revitalization of local historiographical interest in researching aspects of everyday life and the medieval and pre-modern mentality.¹⁸ The investigations, however, mainly focused on the extra-Carpathian areas, which had been treated more rigorously by the scholarly literature and for which, as such, there was more written and archaeological information.¹⁹ As far as historical Transylvania and ancient *Partium* are concerned, the researches were (perhaps subjectively) circumscribed, given the lack of sufficient documentation and material culture, mainly to the pre-modern era (17th - 18th centuries).²⁰

In this context, there is a pressing need for an initial endeavour to systematically address the research on the primary facets of daily life in the urban centres of German foundation and tradition in Transylvania during the Late Middle Ages. Such an effort would prove essential and beneficial.²¹ In order to conduct a study that truly matches the quality and rigour of the current European historical writing, there are two requirements: on the one hand, an inquiry into the historiography of the subject and its related fields,²² and, on the other hand, a review of the

¹⁸ For further details, see Cosmin Cătălin Rusu, "Cercetarea vieții cotidiene în principalele centre urbane ale Transilvaniei medievale târzii. Modelul orașelor ardeleni de fundație și tradiție germană. I. Repere și contexte istoriografice," in *Pasiune și Rigoare. Noi tentații istoriografice. Omagiu profesorului Ovidiu Ghitta, Ionuț Costea, Radu Mârza, Valentin Orga* (eds.) (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, Mega, 2022), 698-716.

¹⁹ Emil I. Emandi, "Viața cotidiană la Suceava lui Ștefan," *Academica*, 2, no. 3-5 (1992); Maria Magdalena Székely, "Pentru o istorie a vieții zilnice," *Magazin Istoric*, 31, no. 5 (1997).

²⁰ Costin Feneșan, "Viața cotidiană la hotarul osmano-transilvănean în secolul al XVII-lea. Câteva documente inedite," *Banatica*, 12, no. 2 (1993); Avram Andea, *Iluminism și modernizare în societatea românească* (Cluj-Napoca: Inter-Tonic, 1996), particularly chapter "Înnoirile vieții cotidiene".

²¹ Any research project dedicated to the topic must consider a continual contextualization of Transylvanian cities within the broader framework of the urban settlements of the Kingdom of Hungary, and the city structures specific to the areas of German colonization in Central-South-Eastern Europe, respectively.

²² Topic discussed in the first part of this study. See note 17.

(re)sources available for study and an attempt to outline a possible analysis grid for the field of the history of late medieval daily life, applied to the case of Transylvanian cities.

From a spatial perspective, the area of interest for the aforementioned analysis is inside the borders of historical Transylvania, circumscribed to the main Transylvanian urban centres of the late Middle Ages - Sibiu, Braşov, Cluj, Bistriţa, Sighişoara, Sebeş and Mediaş. Connected to the evolution of Central-European urban life, from which they originate and with which they maintain a continuous and active connection, the Transylvanian cities established a nuanced specificity from the early decades of their existence. This required the development of clearly defined political-administrative models (proper to the privileged community of the Transylvanian Saxons, in the wider context of the particularism of the Transylvanian Voivodeship), of specific socio-economic frameworks (based on the essential functionality of colonization and perfected by the plurivalence of the socio-professional communities united in Transylvania) and, last but not least, of certain local ethno-confessional variables.

The timeframe under scrutiny in a study of this kind focuses on the Transylvanian late medievalism. Moreover, it must provide a cultural-historical perspective synchronous with the Central European urban realities - as they are usually delimited historically and historiographically - namely between the beginning of the 14th century and the first half of the 16th century. Between these coordinates, the two chronological milestones are (re)marked from a cultural-historical perspective by the *de jure* foundation of Transylvanian cities (the vast majority of them, during the 14th century), and by the appearance and early manifestations of the Renaissance and the religious Reform, respectively (the decades around the middle of the 16th century). In the second half of the 15th century, the significant differences between the Western European cities and those of the Kingdom of Hungary would begin to disappear. Likewise, recent contributions regarding the history of culture in medieval Hungary propose the same chronological interval as a landmark for a new stage in the evolution-transformation of the urban (and rural) structures of everyday life.²³

The current historiography generally agrees that the upper chronological limit of the Transylvanian medieval era is the interval between the Battle of Mohács (1526) and the period of the establishment

²³ Iván Bertényi, "Hungarian Culture in the Middle Ages," in *A cultural history of Hungary. From the Beginnings to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. László Kósa (Budapest: Corvina, 1999), passim.

of the Principality of Transylvania (corresponding to a wider chronological segment, circumscribed to the middle of the 16th century). Thus, the decades of the first half of the 16th century mark, even socio-politically, the end of an important era in the historical evolution of Central-South-Eastern Europe (and implicitly of the Kingdom of Hungary). Similarly, for the Transylvanian Voivodeship, it marks the beginning a new historical stage. The Transylvanian province – integrated into the kingdom, and then independent – in the interval between the middle of the 15th century and the middle of the 16th century, goes through a period of general development of the structures of urban life, now reaching a level of relative synchronization with the specific phenomena of the European central urban civilization environments. In the current phase of historical knowledge, the conventional chronological perspective emerges as the preferred approach for the initial organization of temporal segments in the analysis of the history of the medieval daily urban life in Transylvania. Naturally, the delimitation of more precise time intervals will be possible as the investigation progresses and as chronological landmarks derived directly from the historical evolutions of everyday urban existence emerge.

The problem of sources. A fundamental aspect for defining the research framework is the issue of the primary sources. For the case of medieval Transylvania, they mainly include written sources, in addition to certain testimonies of material culture and iconographic sources. There is a rather limited number of written sources on the topic of the late medieval daily life of the Transylvanian urban area, which hinders most research endeavours. Moreover, the preserved materiality and pictorial representations preserved in relation to these settlements are also rare and fragmentary.

For a study dedicated to the topic, written sources provide the fundamental information that is indeed rich, in terms of quantity and quality. The information is also highly diverse: epigraphic and numismatic, heraldic and sigillographic, cartographic testimonies, urban ordinances and regulations, legal texts, privileges and statutes of guilds and brotherhoods, inventories/registries, city/tax/customs/guilds account books, dowry sheets, diaries, wills, city chancellery documents, notary documents, public and private correspondence, town chronicles, hagiographical writings, accounts of foreign travellers. The limited extent of their preservation, together with the subjective reality of a historiographical delay in terms of the identifying, cataloguing and critical editing of medieval documents (registries), poses challenges in the comprehensive exploration of written information from that era. As a

result, steps towards exhaustive utilization of historical records are not always easy to undertake. The particular case of the Transylvanian medieval towns is somewhat privileged by the accessibility of certain document collections (official documents, accounts, guild statutes, diaries, chronicles, wills), mainly due to the sustained efforts of Saxon historiography, which, starting from the second half of the 19th century, published (or signalled) a good part of written sources with direct or indirect references to the Transylvanian Saxon communities.²⁴

²⁴ For example, we can mention: Albert Berger, *Urkunden Regesten aus dem Archiv der Stadt Bistritz in Siebenbürgen*: I-II (1203-1570) Ernst Wagner (ed.) (Köln, Wien: Böhlau 1986); *Ibid.*, III. (1571-1585), Albert Berger. Mit Ion Dordea, Ioan Drăgan und Konrad G. Gündisch (eds.) (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 1995); *Documente privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Brașovul și cu Țara Ungurească în secolul XV și XVI*. Vol. I. (1413-1508), Ioan Bogdan (ed.) (Bucharest: 1905); *Documente și regeste privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Brașovul și Ungaria în secolele XV-XVI* Ioan Bogdan (ed.) (Bucharest: 1902); Gernot Nussbächer, *Documente privind meșteșugurile din Sighișoara. Catalog de documente, 1376-1598* (Brașov: Aldus 1998); Karl Nussbächer, Friedrich Stenner, Friedrich W. Seraphin, *Verzeichnis der Kronstädter Zunft-Urkunden*. Festschrift gelegentlich des Gewerbetages und der Gewerbe-Ausstellung zu Kronstadt im August 1886 (Kronstadt, 1886); *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Kronstadt (in Siebenbürgen)*: Bd. I. *Rechnungen (1503-1526)* (Kronstadt, 1885); Bd. II. *Rechnungen (1526-1540)* (Kronstadt, 1889); Bd. III. *Rechnungen (1475, 1541-1550, 1571)* (Kronstadt, 1896); Bd. IV. *Chroniken und Tagebücher I. (1143-1867)* (Kronstadt, 1903); Bd. V. *Chroniken und Tagebücher II. (1392-1851)* (Kronstadt, 1909); Bd. VI. *Chroniken und Tagebücher III. (1549-1825)* (Kronstadt, 1915); Bd. VII, Beiheft 1. *Die Beamten der Stadt Brassó (Kronstadt) von Anfängen der städtischen Verwaltung bis auf der Gegenwart*. Zusammengestellt von Friedrich Stenner (Kronstadt, 1916); Bd. VIII, Heft 1. *Annales ecclesiastici. Schriften der Mag. Marcus Fronius* (Kronstadt, 1926); Bd. VIII, Heft 2. *Annales ecclesiastici 1556 (1531) - 1706 (1763)* (Kronstadt, 1928 and Heidelberg, 2002); Bd. IX. *Zunfturkunden (1420-1580)* (Heidelberg, 1999); *A kolozsmonostori konvent jegyzőkönyvei*. I-II (1289-1556). Kivonatokban közzétetve és a bevezető tanulmányt írta Jakó Zs. (Budapest, 1990); Alexandru Lapadatu, *Documentele istorice din arhivele Brașovului* (Bucharest: 1903); Stoica Nicolaescu, *Documente slavo-române cu privire la relațiile Țării Românești și Moldovei cu Ardealul în secolele XV și XVI. Privilegiu comerciale, scrisori domnești și particulare din arhivele Sibiului, Brașovului și Bistriței din Transilvania* (Bucharest, 1905); *Quellen zur Geschichte Siebenbürgens aus sächsischen Archiven*: Bd. I. *Rechnungen aus dem Archiv der Stadt Hermannstadt und der sächsischen Nation (1380-1516)*, Wilhelm Capesius, Heinrich Herbert, Friedrich Teutsch (eds.) (Hermannstadt: 1880); *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Hermannstadt*. Bd. II. *Handel und Gewerbe in Hermannstadt und in den Sieben Stühlen (1224-1579)*, Monica Vlaicu (ed.) (Hermannstadt: 2003); Bd. III. *Inschriften der Stadt Hermannstadt aus dem Mittelalter und der Frühen Neuzeit*. Bearb. von Ioan Albu. (Sibiu/Heidelberg: 2002); *534 documente istorice slavo-române din Țara-Românească și Moldova privitoare la legăturile cu Ardealul (1346-1603) din arhivele orașelor Brașov și Bistrița* - originally published in Slavic, together with its Romanian translation, printed in Vienna, between 1905-1906, by the Adolf Holzhausen printing press, under the supervision of Grigore G. Tocilescu (Bucharest: 1931); *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*: Bd. I. (1191-1342) (Hermannstadt: 1892); Bd. II. (1342-1390) (Hermannstadt: 1897); Bd. III. (1391-1415) (Hermannstadt: 1902); Bd. IV. (1416-1437) (Hermannstadt: 1937); Bd. V. (1438-1457)

In order to properly exploit these documents in the reconstruction of various aspects of daily life, they must be adequately processed, a task that seems to prove rather challenging at times. The language of the sources is often difficult to understand. Medieval terminology – which, in the particular case of Transylvania, gradually became multilingual – is never consistent and, as a rule, does not convey certain data to the later reader. The definition of a consistent and critical reading grid, integrated and consistently applied to each category of documentary material, is only with rare exceptions practiced in historiography with reference to the medieval urban history of Transylvania. In this context, the method of cataloguing and ordering information must follow a clear structure – in accordance with well-defined categories of information – in order to allow simultaneous corroboration with the complementary elements offered by material culture and/or iconography.

Very varied in scope, the information identifiable in the written sources offers a relatively large volume of specific data, which, however, could be correlated and systematised according to the coordinates of the classical historical reconstruction only to a small extent. A symptomatic example from this point of view is represented by the accounts of foreign travellers, which mentioned the medieval urban centres of Transylvania. Analysed from a critical perspective, the information provided by this type of sources²⁵ remains permanently linked to the person writing them

(Bucharest: 1975); Bd. VI. (1458-1473) (Bucharest: 1981); Bd. VII. (1474-1486) (Bucharest: 1991). Franz Zimmermann, Carl Werner, Georg Müller, Michael Auner, Gustav Gündisch, Herta Gündisch, Gernot Nussbächer und Konrad G. Gündisch (eds.).

²⁵ The earliest accounts that reference the medieval urban centres of Transylvania usually offer a very varied palette of relevant data from the point of view of everyday realities, but they are mostly succinct. Their accuracy is difficult to approximate with respect to the information presented and they are almost without exception impossible to verify through other types of sources. Known since the first decades of the 16th century, the descriptions and assessments of city visitors or chroniclers refer, as the case may be, to aspects regarding: a) the etymology of city names, the delimitation of the most important/significant urban centres (in terms of wealth, extent, population, political-military/economic-social/confessional-ethnic role), urban developments (from market status to city status); b) the administrative and territorial organization of urban communities (suburbs and neighbourhoods), the social categories present and active in city life, the population of cities (ethnicities, languages and confessions, restrictions regarding access to cities and the ethnic distribution of neighbourhoods and suburbs); c) description of the city's surroundings (climate elements, relief, hydrographic network), peri-urban dromocracy; d) city fortification systems (curtain walls, towers, gates, ramparts, ditches, canal networks), urban architecture; e) supplying cities (with water, food/salt, gold); f) clothing; g) studies and urban libraries; h) town halls/yards; i) urban settlements as exchange markets (carried products, merchants) and j) qualities and characteristics of the townspeople, traditions and customs, behavioural attitudes, mentalities and urban imaginary

(and to their employment/involvement or their degree of knowledge regarding the events and realities they present, respectively), or, as the case may be, to subsequent authors who take over and circulate the information, often mimetically. Naturally, data with a predominantly descriptive character usually have the chance, at least apparently, of restitutions closer to the reality of the era. Practically, each testimony is constituted in a separate situation. Sometimes, the information does not arrive directly, but is “filtered” by other characters, while the author of the text was merely the editor (for example, in the case of stories that borrow parts from older works). At other times, the personal experience of the “traveller” was very short-lived and extremely limited, from a documentary viewpoint, in the sense of the traveller’s access to correct or relevant information. Moreover, personal experiences and impressions – be they positive or negative – impact the degree of subjectivity in descriptions. Some authors do not use their urban way of being/thinking directly, but they do resort to comparisons with aspects from their own environments and with the living standards of urban areas – usually rather condescending towards the realities encountered. Despite the fact that the information from these sources is often vague and difficult to verify, it represents a valuable auxiliary for completing the image of everyday life in the cities of the Transylvanian Middle Ages. However, their analysis must be completed by an additional reading key. The nuances used by the editors of these narrative sources for the translation/explanation of certain terms were not always the most appropriate. If, in the initial (general) context of the translations, these terms probably seemed insignificant, at the time of an analysis that focuses on recomposing the smallest details of everyday existence, the exact meanings and messages of these notions become very important.²⁶

The specificity of the known documentary sources in relation to the Transylvanian medieval cities often calls for exclusively retrospective investigations. The oldest preserved written information (often only from the first half of the 16th century, and in some cases even from the second half of the century) conditions and limits, in certain situations, the historical reconstruction to the formulation of assumptions and theories – which must be verified by means of future introspections and analyses specific to each topic addressed separately. In the rare situations in which it appears, information from the 14th century is usually very succinct with regard to the relevant elements of different aspects of everyday life. Its volume, complexity and accuracy increase especially during the second

²⁶ This is the case, for example, of terms such as streets, canals, neighbourhoods, suburbs, etc.

half of the 15th century and during the decades of the first half of the following century.

Naturally, the reconstruction of the cities' daily existence could benefit from the contribution of material culture testimonies (as the case may be, recovered through archaeological means, identifiable through observations in the field or by capitalizing on museum or private collections) and iconographic sources from the era or from later. These types of sources are practically indispensable for deepening (and often even for deciphering!) the information that can be found in written sources, facilitating the real and/or visual support, of substance, for outlining complex and comprehensive images of everyday life. Unfortunately, the case of Transylvania offers only a small opportunity to capitalize on these types of sources. Medieval urban archaeology research has not had the span required here until now. Objective or subjective reasons mostly restricted it from the point of view of the investigated area. At the same time, however, the processing of the revealed material (or preserved in different collections) was not generally carried out at an appropriate scientific standard and, therefore, cannot be used in studies dedicated to the reconstruction of everyday life: a consistent technical-methodological language has not yet been defined, to be used specifically for this field; the illustration auxiliary to the texts is often missing or practically unusable because of the lack of interest in details and graphic/photographic reconstructions; cultural-historical context interpretations are almost completely absent. Regarding the iconographic sources, the situation is partly similar. The late medieval testimonies with historical value – identifiable in the wall paintings, sculptures and manifestations of minor art in Transylvanian cities – have a rather exceptional character. These have been catalogued and returned to the scientific circuit almost exclusively from the perspective of sources specific to art history reconstructions. Therefore, they require a fresh approach, applied to a reinterpreted analysis grid. The earliest cartographic resources date back to the first half of the 16th century. However, detailed elements crucial for reconstructing everyday life frames typically emerge in these sources only from the 17th to the 18th centuries.

Research schedule and analysis grid. Based on the historiographic documentation, the theoretical-methodological excursion and the identification of the potential and the limits of the available sources, the perspective that this study proposes is that of a research program dedicated to the reconstruction of the history of everyday life in the urban centres of late medieval Transylvania. The approach is

structured in three parts: a) that of the recomposing of frames and the dynamics of daily urban life; b) that of revealing the fundamental structures of everyday life in cities and c) that of identifying the challenges and solutions assumed by the day-to-day existence of individuals, groups and the urban community.

A first research approach considers the delimitation of the natural and cultural environmental frameworks of the emergence and development of urban everyday life. Thematically, the analysis starts from the identification of the environments of formation and functioning-development of the daily life of urban settlements, studying their daily structure and morphology, and follows the individual/community relationship <-> daily urban existence/perception. Urban settlements can thus offer a bivalent perspective: one from their outside (what could be perceived in the concrete-real and imaginary-symbolic way when you approached these settlements and gradually discovered their suburbs and urban areas, streets and houses, people and customs) and one of their specific, inner identity (what and how exactly the inhabitants perceived in relation to the daily life of their own settlement).

1. I. "The city" outside the city. Proximity and urban extensions
1. II. The boundaries of the "Inner City": perimeter-defensive structures; walls and towers; gates, roads and bridges
1. III. Unbuilt perimeters and public spaces (streets and squares)
1. IV. (Re)Presentations of the city: own images and "external" perspectives
1. V. The advantages and risks of mobility: People (travel) and Goods (trade)

The second direction of research is dedicated to reconstructing the main milestones of daily life in cities, starting from the fundamental existential needs and reaching the most relevant identity resources for individuals and communities:

2. I. Food traditions and dining culture
2. II. Clothing and "costume"
2. III. Housing: home and household
2. IV. Daily activities with gainful functions: urban occupations and (hand)crafts
2. V. "The third time" - the time of feast and celebration
2. VI. The everyday functions of ethnicity and religion

Finally, the third component project of the program analyses the dynamics of everyday life in its own sense, attempting to identify the issues (challenges) permanently generated and the solutions (answers) identified in the context of existence of the urban community:

3. I. Care for water
3. II. Care for food
3. III. Care for wood and construction materials
3. IV. Protection against fire
3. V. Sanitary protection and hygiene
3. VI. Safety in the city and city security
3. VII. Natural phenomena and calamities, famine, epidemics and epizootics
3. VIII. Waste and pollution

From an analytical perspective, the research aims to trace the interdependence between different elements of everyday life. These – conditioning and influencing everyday life – offer the chance to rediscover the Transylvanian late medieval cities in their specific evolutionary dynamics, as the main vectors of mobility (“import” and innovation) and confluences (“modernity” and progress). In classical historical reconstruction research approaches, the individual or the community have rarely been actively integrated into these frameworks. For example, extensive works have been written about the civil, military or religious medieval urban architecture of Transylvania, but questions regarding how and to what extent these constructions were exploited in the most concrete way – in the mundane or, as the case may be, the exceptional everyday life – by the people who built/operated them or by those for whom they were intended, have not been addressed. The multiplication of this type of investigation/model should be applied to aspects regarding food or clothing, to the profitable activities and moments of relaxation of the inhabitants, to urban hygiene (personal and public) or to the challenges raised by the risks of mobility, famine, wars, epidemics and natural disasters. To the extent to which the sources are accessible, an investigation subsumed to the research of the daily life of the city also has the chance to capture details of ordinary life, common to individual or community experience (vital needs); conventional elements, with a socio-religious substrate (social conventions and norms, moral and ethical values) and the valorisation of structural factors (socio-economic or material/object culture).

The main purpose of such a research program can be fulfilled by setting up a framework initiative to investigate the history of medieval and pre-modern everyday life, which proposes the creation of documentary data banks (for written sources, material culture and iconography), of certain monographic studies dedicated to relevant case studies and thematic volumes. The envisaged model is that of quantitative and qualitative studies, which are integrated and

comparative, part of the already established research dedicated to the environments of the late medieval and premodern German tradition urban everyday life of Central Europe.

The research of different aspects and manifestations of everyday existence can and must be relevant because the everyday (re)constructs images and categories of life. Initiating projects and, in parallel, methodological debates dedicated to the topic must become a priority for Transylvanian historical environments, where such restitutions with reference to the medieval and pre-modern world are almost completely absent. Transylvanian historiography needs histories of everyday life, because only they can recompose, analyse and explain the ambivalent relationship between people and their (structural) living environment. The modern investigation of medieval and pre-modern everyday life must also undertake in this historiographical space the delimitation from the old approaches of the history of culture, by employing at least four elements: a different way of interrogating everyday life, seen as a human/object relationship and (mainly) human /life environment; a changed perspective of analysis, mainly oriented towards the social history and that of the structures; the delimitation of its own critical methods of analysis, adapted to the local cultural-historical specifics and, last but not least, the undertaking of the reconstruction of the history of everyday life seen not only as an approach that narrates and describes, but also as one that structures and explains.